



# Town of Groton, Connecticut

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## Meeting Minutes - **Draft**

### Town Council Committee of the Whole

**Mayor Harry A. Watson, Councilors Peter J. Bartinik, Jr., Natalie Burfoot Billing, Heather Sherman Bond, Catherine Kolnaski, Frank O'Beirne, Jr., Paulann H. Sheets, Thomas J. Skrmetti, and Elissa T. Wright.**

**Tuesday, July 12, 2005**

**7:00 PM**

**Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1**

#### **REGULAR MEETING**

#### **1. CALL TO ORDER**

*Mayor Watson called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.*

#### **2. ROLL CALL**

Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Bartinik, Jr., Councilor Bond, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr. and Councilor Sheets

Members Absent: Councilor Billing, Councilor Skrmetti and Councilor Wright

#### **3. Calendar and Communications**

*Councilor Sheets visited the Chipperini property on Library Street to see the status of the retaining wall. She expressed concern with exposed rebar and asked for an update on the issue. Town Manager Oefinger noted that he has communicated with the Town Attorney on this issue and he believes there is a tentative court date set. Ms. Chipperini did quite a bit of work last year, but she did not finish. Councilor Sheets asked that the fencing be reestablished; however the snow fencing in place does not belong to the Town.*

*Councilor Sheets shared a compliment from Mary Summers regarding how well-prepared the Council is and what a high level of discussion takes place at the meetings.*

*Councilor Sheets also received a communication from Mrs. Hewley regarding people at Sutton Park drinking alcohol. Councilor Sheets noted there are ordinances that prohibit drinking in public places or at school functions, but they may not cover drinking in Sutton Park. She asked for a referral on this issue or a discussion of the Town's policies. Mayor Watson also heard from Mrs. Hewley and he asked for additional information from the Director of Parks and Recreation, including the rules for the parks. Mayor Watson has responded to Mrs. Hewley and passed the matter on to the Town Manager.*

*Councilor Sheets read a letter from Lenny Winkler that was received on June 28th in support of PLAs.*

#### **4. Approval of Minutes**

**2005-0204**

**Approval of Minutes (Committee of the Whole)**

**RESOLUTION ACCEPTING COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MINUTES**

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the Town Council Committee of the Whole of June 28, 2005 are hereby accepted and approved.

**A motion was made by Councilor Sheets, seconded by Councilor Bartinik, Jr., to adopt.**

**The motion carried unanimously.**

#### **5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

*None*

#### **6. NEW BUSINESS**

**1999-0206 Noank Hatchery Proposal****Discussed**

*Assistant to the Town Manager Vincent provided a history of this issue. A bill transferring the property to the Town has been passed by the legislature and put into Public Act form. Governor Rell is expected to sign it within a week. This transfer will need to be referred to the RTM. The Planning Commission has already reviewed this item under CGS 8-24.*

**2002-0116 Efficiencies in Town Government (Fire Districts, DPW, GLP, and BOE)****Discussed**

*Town Manager Oefinger noted receipt of the mini management studies from the Coast Guard cadets and the Fleet Study. He suggested that the Town may want to invite the consultant for the Fleet Study to address the Council and RTM. Councilors asked that a thank you be sent to the Coast Guard for their efforts, and that copies of the studies be placed in the libraries. It was also suggested that one of the Coast Guard advisors make a presentation on the studies and discussion followed. The Town Manager asked that any questions on the report be forwarded to his office. Councilor Sheets suggested that at a minimum the Council should discuss how to use the reports. It was decided that a special meeting would be scheduled for a presentation on the Fleet Study.*

**2003-0016 BRAC-2005/Update****Discussed**

*Councilor O'Beirne provided an update for the Committee. The group is collecting and analyzing additional information to be provided to BRAC staff in Washington.*

**2003-0198 Public Water & Sewer on Flanders Road/Industrial area****Discussed**

*Town Manager Oefinger noted this project is underway. Town staff has met with Fuss & O'Neill regarding possible routes. A short list is expected by the end of July, with an evaluation of the routes completed by August 18th. A draft report should be available around the middle of September. The Town expects to meet with business owners when more information is available. Staff is also working with Groton Utilities on the water extension issue.*

*Councilor Sheets talked about the businesses she visited on Flanders Road, and noted this region has the potential to generate new businesses.*

**2005-0119 Ackley Property, Route 117 - Potential Acquisition****Recommended for Deletion**

*Town Manager Oefinger does not have a definitive answer on whether the owner of this property wants to sell or not, and he has not been able to determine an asking price. The consensus of the Committee was to delete this referral after the Town Manager contacts the seller.*

**2005-0129 Golf Course Maintenance/Capital Needs****Discussed**

*Director of Parks and Recreation John Silsby reviewed Councilor Bartinik's referral request. Regarding hiring a private management firm, other steps have been taken to generate additional revenue. One big issue is finding money to make improvements to the golf course, and most private management companies do not make investments in the course. In addition, it is not desirable to turn over control of the golf course to a private entity. Councilor Bartinik noted that the report stated the Town is overpaying for labor, with one option being turning over management of the golf course to a private firm. Councilor Bartinik asked if other Councilors would be open to seeking a proposal and discussing it. Councilor Bond expressed support for looking at options and talking to management companies. Councilor Sheets concurred and asked if the next step would be a Request for Proposal. Mr. Silsby provided a brief history of the golf*

course operations.

Councilor O'Beirne suggested that an RFP creates expectations on the part of the firms submitting proposals that they will get the job. The Council needs to decide if they want to privatize first. Councilor O'Beirne added that a municipality seeking information from consultants is very different from a private business doing the same thing.

Town Manager Oefinger would not support issuing an RFP. He suggested that the golf course consultant be invited back to address the Council, with specific emphasis on the merits of privatizing. The study itself was designed to provide the Council with input and expertise. The recommendations call for addressing problem areas, but keeping the course part of municipal government. Negotiations are currently underway with labor regarding overtime issues.

Councilor Bartinik noted two conclusions of the study: overpaying for labor, and the need for large-scale capital improvements. He has not seen any attempt to address the overpaying for labor issues since the study was released, and in fact feels that more of the golf course function is being merged with the overall function of the Town.

Councilor Kolnaski agreed with the Town Manager's recommendation to bring the consultant in. Even if a private company was brought in to manage the course, there would still be a need for capital improvements.

Town Manager Oefinger reiterated his concerns with issuing an RFP. He noted that there is also a suggestion to set up an advisory board. The Town Manager further noted that he is not able to discuss labor negotiations outside of executive session, but any changes are likely to be incremental.

Councilor Sheets explained that she questioned issuing an RFP as a means to move forward.

Councilor Bond feels that the Council needs more information from private management firms before it can consider privatization. Town Manager Oefinger expressed concern with the quality of the information that will be provided to the Council if the Town is not committed to pursuing privatization. As an alternative, the Town could pick one or two firms and request a proposal for a fee, similar to what was done for the school project. Councilor Bartinik feels the problems identified in the study should be addressed. Councilor O'Beirne feels the Town's professionals should come up with a solution. Although excess labor costs were identified, that is not a sufficient cause to privatize.

Mr. Silsby indicated there has been significant discussion about involving the Parks and Recreation Commission in the decision making. The Commission would like to form an advisory group to review the recommendations of the study, with those issues needing Town Council action being brought to the Council. Staff has identified and categorized recommendations in the study and identified a timetable. Some decisions will be driven by the budget, while others are considered for the short or long term. At this point, staff is looking for support from the Town Council to establish an advisory board.

Councilor Sheets noted that the information provided on recommendations and a timetable represents staff's plan, but it differs from what Council Bartinik is requesting. Discussion followed. Councilor Bartinik does not feel that his request #2 has been addressed and it is a policy decision. Town Manager Oefinger explained that revenues are funding the operating costs for the golf course. In the long term, the Town needs to consider if capital improvements should be paid for out of the General Fund. Town Manager Oefinger explained the financial difficulties at the golf course, which started with a loan from the Town for capital improvements and then the institution of cost allocation in 1994. In the last budget, costs allocated to the golf course were

over \$100,000. The unknown is what level of improvements to the facilities the Town should pay for, which is a policy decision. The Town Manager explained that this is the one facility where the Town has minimized the cost to the Town's taxpayers. He further noted that there are inconsistencies in cost allocation and the Town is beginning to look at those allocation practices.

Councilor Bartinik would support having operating revenues pay for operating costs with capital improvements paid out of the General Fund, and he asked about the timetable. Town Manager Oefinger stated he would like more experience with the golf course to determine what improvements the Town would appropriately pay for.

Councilor Bond asked if the Town has ever considered an aggressive capital campaign for the facility, and Mr. Silsby stated no, but the advisory board could look at that.

By consensus, the Committee of the Whole expressed support for establishment of an advisory board. Councilor Sheets asked that the advisory board address the privatization issue.

**2005-0169      Donation of Land (Poirier)**

**Discussed**

This parcel is adjacent to Shennecossett Golf Course. The Committee received a memo from Director of Planning and Development Mike Murphy with background on the property. The Town Manager would recommend consideration of this parcel for acquisition, and referral to the Planning Commission under CGS 8-24.

A motion was made by Councilor Sheets, seconded by Councilor Bond, to recommend a resolution referring this item to the Planning Commission under CGS 8-24.

Council Kolnaski expressed concerns with taking property that is primarily wetlands off the tax rolls, requiring the Town to maintain it. The Town Manager explained the value is in the buffer the parcel provides for neighbors and protection of the drainage feature of the wetlands. The Committee asked that this item also be referred to the City of Groton Wetlands Commission.

The motion carried unanimously.

**2005-0046      Burrows/Copp Property - Potential Acquisition**

**Recommended for Deletion**

Town Manager Oefinger reported that the Copp/Burrows families have entered into a purchase and sales agreement with the Odd Fellows for the parcel on Military Highway. The Town has withdrawn the application for funding that was submitted by the Trust for Public Lands.

**2005-0208      Approval of Resolution Approving Amount of Bonds to be Issued in 2005**

**Recommended for a Resolution**

The Town is preparing to sell bonds and will be holding a meeting/conference calls with the bond rating agencies. Director of Finance Sal Pandolfo reviewed a suggested resolution approving the amount of bonds to be issued in 2005. Mr. Pandolfo provided a handout showing projects approved at referendum, the amounts bonded, dates, bond anticipation note maturity dates, and other pertinent information.

A motion was made by Mayor Watson, seconded by Councilor Bartinik, Jr., that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously.

**7.      Consideration of Committee Referral Items as per Town Council Referral List**

None

**8.      OTHER BUSINESS**

None

9. ADJOURNMENT

*A motion was made by Councilor Sheets, seconded by Councilor Kolnaski, to adjourn at 9:17 p.m.*

*The motion carried unanimously.*